

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: GUIDELINES FOR TESTING IN THE VIRGINIA STATE ASSESSMENT PROGRAM (NORM-REFERENCED TESTING)

This document provides information about testing students with disabilities on the norm-referenced tests which comprise the Virginia State Assessment Program (VSAP). Included in this document are 1) guidelines for determining in what ways students with disabilities should participate in VSAP, 2) procedures for providing testing accommodations, 3) documentation requirements, and 4) reporting considerations.

I. Who Should Be Tested in the VSAP

It is expected that all students who are in grades 4, 6, and 9 in the Commonwealth of Virginia are to be tested in the VSAP. This expectation includes all students with disabilities at these grade levels unless the student is exempted as documented in the student's individual educational program (IEP) or Section 504 management tool.

II. Background

The Stanford 9 tests, which comprise the VSAP, are norm-referenced tests. The scores which result from this type of test when administered under standard conditions compare the student's performance with scores of students in the same grade from across the nation. These comparisons are made possible through the creation of norms for the test. Norming involves giving the test in exactly the same way (standardized conditions) to a sample of students who are chosen to be representative of students from across the nation. The scores of students who take the test after it has been normed can then be compared to the scores of students in the norming group. Such a comparison provides a means of determining how local student achievement measures up to the achievement of students across the country.

To ensure the most valid comparison of a student's performance with that of the students across the nation, students must take the test under the same standard conditions used to test students in the norming sample. For example, the same directions must be used each time students are tested and the time limits for each test must be strictly enforced. The norming sample for the Stanford 9 included students with disabilities who were able to take the test under standardized conditions. Therefore, the Stanford 9 should provide an accurate measure of how the achievement of Virginia students including those with disabilities compare to students across the nation unless the students are not able to take the test under standardized conditions.

III. Reason for Including Students with Disabilities in the VSAP

It is the intent of the Commonwealth of Virginia to include students with disabilities in the VSAP. Also, the federal regulations under the Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and state regulations under the Virginians with Disabilities Act, Section 51.5-40 *et. seq.* of the Code of Virginia, require that individuals with disabilities be given equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from the policies and procedures customarily granted to all individuals. Therefore, students with disabilities must have the opportunity to participate in the VSAP administered by the school division.

For each student with a disability identified under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), P.L. 101-476, the individual educational program (IEP) committee has the responsibility to determine how the student will participate in the VSAP. If a student is identified as an otherwise "qualified handicapped" student under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the IEP is not the mechanism for determining the educational program, a division should identify and convene a committee of similar composition to that which acted to evaluate and determine program needs for the student and determine how the student will participate in the VSAP.

IV. Role of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) Committee

(for students identified under Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, P.L. 101-476)

For all students with disabilities identified under the IDEA, the Individualized Education Program (IEP) is the management tool to ensure that they receive an appropriate education. The IEP process also ensures that each student's parent, legal guardian, or surrogate parent is an active participant of the IEP committee. Decisions as to participation in the VSAP, the need for and selection of accommodations, or the exemption from participating in the VSAP are the responsibility of the IEP committee. These decisions should be made during the IEP committee meeting which precedes the VSAP administration and the student's parent, legal guardian, or surrogate parent and the student when appropriate must understand the ramifications of the decisions made. A student's IEP must address the student's participation in the VSAP. Participation will be in one or more of the following ways:

- with no accommodations
- with accommodations which maintain standard conditions (listing specific accommodations)
- with accommodations which are permissible but do not maintain standard conditions (listing specific accommodations)
- exemption from testing with an explanation for the exemption and a statement of the ramification of the decision

V. Role of Duly Convened 504 Committee

(for students identified under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and not operating under an IEP)

Each division is mandated to determine appropriate educational programs for all students with disabilities who qualify under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 by convening a knowledgeable group to evaluate and determine program needs. Therefore, decisions as to the participation in the VSAP, the need for and selection of accommodations, or the exemption from participating in the VSAP are the responsibility of a duly convened committee of similar composition. Each student's parent, legal guardian, or surrogate parent and the student when appropriate must be an active participant in these decisions and understand the ramifications of any decisions made. A student's management tool must document these decisions. This should be made during the 504 committee meeting which precedes the VSAP administration. A student's

504 management tool must address the student's participation in the VSAP. Participation will be in one or more of the following ways:

- with no accommodations
- with accommodations which maintain standard conditions (listing specific accommodations)
- with accommodations which are permissible but do not maintain standard conditions (listing specific accommodations)
- exemption from testing with an explanation for the exemption and a statement of the ramification of the decision

VI. Determination of How Students with Disabilities Participate in the VSAP

Decisions about how a student with a disability will be tested in the VSAP should be made **for each subtest**. For example, the student may be able to attempt the problem solving subtest of the mathematics test without accommodations but may need accommodations on the reading comprehension subtest of the reading test. In determining how a student with a disability will participate in the VSAP the IEP or 504 committee should consider the following questions:

- 1) Does the student receive instruction in areas covered by the VSAP subtests?

This question should be answered **for each subtest** of the VSAP.

- If YES, proceed to question 2 to determine the need for testing accommodations.
- If NO, the student should be exempted (see **Section VIII, Exempting Students With Disabilities from the VSAP**).

- 2) If the student is to participate, then does the student typically receive accommodations during instruction or during classroom assessments?

- If YES, the committee should refer to **Section VII, Selection of Testing Accommodations for Students With Disabilities**, to determine, by subtest, the accommodations needed by the student.
- If NO, the student should participate in the VSAP subtest with no accommodations.

VII. Selection of Testing Accommodations for Students With Disabilities

Decisions as to the need for and selection of accommodations for students with disabilities is the responsibility of the IEP or 504 committee. Typically, accommodations can be classified in the following categories: timing/scheduling, setting, presentation, and response to allow for an equal opportunity to demonstrate achievement. The inclusion of accommodations to be used by the student when participating in the VSAP tests must be specified in the student's IEP or 504 management tool. For example, it may state:

"The student will participate in the VSAP as scheduled for (month) of (year). The following accommodations will be observed:

(list of specific accommodations by subtest)".

The accommodations described below should be considered when determining how the student will participate. This must be determined on an individual basis and listed in the IEP or other management tool for the year the student is scheduled to participate in the VSAP tests.

Accommodations should be chosen based on what the student generally uses during classroom instruction and assessment as identified on the student's IEP or management tool. These accommodations are those which the student uses on a daily basis and are not just used for participating in the VSAP. The use of an unfamiliar accommodation during testing may have a negative impact on the student's performance. Finally, an accommodation based solely on potential to enhance performance beyond providing equal opportunity to perform is inappropriate.

A. Accommodations Which Maintain Standard Conditions

Administration of the VSAP tests under standard conditions will yield scores that compare the student's performance with scores of students in the same grade from across the nation. The score of students who take the VSAP tests using accommodations which maintain the standard conditions will be aggregated into school and division summary information. These accommodations may be of the following types: 1) timing/scheduling, 2) setting, 3) presentation, and 4) response. They are:

Timing/Scheduling

- flexible schedule (order of subtest)
- administer the test in several sessions (a subtest must be completed in one session)
- time of day
- administer test over several days (such as 1 or 2 subtest per day)
- allow long breaks between subtests

Setting

- preferential seating (at the front of the room or in a study carrel)
- small group testing
- individual testing
- special lighting
- adaptive or special furniture
- test administered in locations with minimal distractions
- noise buffers
- hospital/home

Presentation

- magnifying glass
- amplification equipment (e.g., hearing aid or auditory trainer)

- templates
- masks or markers to maintain place
- large print test and answer document
- increase size of answer bubbles
- simplifying oral directions
- written directions
- interpreting oral directions (e.g. signing, cued speech) (test questions may not be interpreted)

Response

- student marks booklet and teacher/proctor transfer answers to answer sheet at grades 4, 6, and 9
- four function calculators (only on the problem solving subtest at grades 6 and 9)
- abacus (only on the problem solving subtest at grades 6 and 9)
- arithmetic tables (only on the problem solving subtest at grades 6 and 9)
- large diameter/ special grip pencil
- pencil grip

NOTE: Questions about whether accommodations not listed here result in a standard administration of the test should be directed to the school division's Director of Testing who may consult with Department of Education staff as necessary.

B. Accommodations Which Are Permissible But Do **Not** Maintain Standard Conditions

Accommodations which are permissible but do not maintain standard conditions of the test should be used only if the accommodations are those the student generally uses during classroom instruction and assessment, are identified on the student's IEP or management tool, and the IEP or 504 committee agrees that the student requires such accommodations in order to participate in the VSAP. Scores resulting from this administration of the VSAP must be interpreted with caution. These scores will not be aggregated into school and division summaries. Such scores can provide an indication of a student's strengths and weaknesses, but they do not provide an accurate indication of how well the student performed in comparison to students in the norming sample. These accommodations may be of the following types: 1) timing/scheduling, 2) presentation, and 3) response. Examples of accommodations which are permissible but do not maintain standard conditions include:

Timing/Scheduling

- extended time on subtests
- breaks during a subtest

Presentation

- Braille (some items are eliminated-different norms)
- reading of test items on subtests other than the reading test
- interpreting (e.g. signing, cued speech) of test items on subtests other than reading test
- reading embedded directions and sample items to student
- interpreting (e.g. signing, cued speech) embedded directions and sample items to student
- using a communication board/pictorial presentation

NOTE: Reading and interpreting (e.g. signing, cued speech) of reading test items is not permissible.

Response

- student marks booklet and teacher/proctor transfer answers to answer sheet at grade 4
- students responds verbally and teacher/proctor marks answer sheet
- braille answer form
- calculator (on the problem solving fourth grade subtest and procedures subtest at grades 4, 6, and 9)
- abacus (on the problem solving fourth grade subtest and procedures subtest at grades 4, 6, and 9)
- arithmetic tables (on the problem solving fourth grade subtest and procedures subtest at grades 4, 6, and 9)
- using a communication board/pictorial presentation

NOTE: Questions about whether accommodations not listed here result in a nonstandard administration of the test should be directed to the school division's Director of Testing who may consult with Department of Education staff as necessary.

VIII. Exempting Students With Disabilities from the VSAP

The ramification for this decision must be explained and understood by the student's parent, legal guardian, or surrogate parent and the student when appropriate. Also, the decision of the IEP or 504 committee to exempt a student from the VSAP testing must be documented in the student's IEP or 504 management tool with an explanation for the exemption and a statement of the ramification of the decision. It must be clear that this decision to exempt is only for the duration of the current IEP or 504 management tool and must be reviewed during the IEP or 504 committee meeting which precedes future administrations of the VSAP tests. In making decisions related to the exemption of students from VSAP testing, school division personnel should remember that the exemption of students will reduce the percentage of students being tested. Participation rates are reported for each school division on the VSAP state report. The exemption of a student from a subtest used in computing the composite for a test will result in no composite being reported for the student.

IX. Reporting Implications

Below is a chart which summarizes the impact on individual student scores and on school/division summaries for students with disabilities who are 1) tested without accommodations, 2) tested with accommodations which maintain standard conditions (standard accommodations), 3) tested with accommodations which are permissible but do not maintain standard conditions (nonstandard accommodations), and 4) exempted from testing in the VSAP.

Testing Situation	Individual Scores	School/Division Summaries
Without Accommodations	Individual student scores reported.	Scores included in school/division averages
With "Standard" Accommodations	Individual student scores reported.	Scores included in school/division averages
With "Nonstandard" Accommodations	Individual student scores reported. Record of score accompanied by notation explaining that scores resulted from nonstandard administration *.	Scores not included in school/division averages; instead summaries report number of students in a disability category who took the test under nonstandard conditions
Exempted from Testing	No scores reported.	Reported in "Report of Students not Tested" Information by disability may be available.

*As noted above scores which result from a nonstandard administration of a norm-referenced test must be interpreted with caution. Such scores can provide an indication of a student's strengths and weaknesses, but they do not provide an accurate indication of how well the student performed in comparison to students in the norming sample. For example: suppose that a student has extended time on the reading and math subtest of the norm-referenced test (a nonstandard accommodation) and receives national percentile ranks of 75 on the math subtest and 53 on the reading subtest. It is appropriate to interpret these scores as indicating greater achievement in math than in reading on the norm-referenced test. However, because the student was not tested under the same conditions as the students in the norming sample, it is not appropriate to say that this student scored as well or better on the math subtest than 75% of the students in the norming sample or that the student scored as well or better on the reading subtest than 53% of the students in the norming sample

Special Note: Braille Version

There are national norms for the Braille version of this test. The scores of students who take the Braille version of the test can then be compared to the scores of students in the norming group for the Braille version. This is a nonstandard accommodation because the Braille version of the test contains only those items that can be Brailled. Thus, some items on the VSAP have been eliminated from the Braille version. This results in scores that can not be included in school/division averages.

Sample Notations for All Nonstandard Administrations (except Braille):

The above scores which result from a nonstandard administration of a norm-referenced test must be interpreted with caution. Such scores can provide an indication of a student's strengths and weaknesses, but they do not provide an accurate indication of how well the student performed in comparison to students in the norming sample. It is appropriate to interpret these scores relative to the student's individual performance. If a student's score is higher in math than reading than the only thing you can say is that "the scores indicate greater achievement in math than in reading on the norm-referenced test." These scores do not tell you the level of achievement for the student in math or reading.

Sample Braille Version Notation:

This is a nonstandard accommodation because the Braille version of the test contains only those items that can be Brailled. Thus, some items on the VSAP have been eliminated from the Braille version. However, there are national norms for the Braille version of this test. The scores of students who take the Braille version of the test can then be compared to the scores of students in the norming group for the Braille version.